

# CHAPTER FIVE

## Culture and Communication

### **A: Main Teaching Points (by textbook section)**

In general, this chapter discusses models for analyzing communication in the workplace and shows how cultural factors influence the choice of an appropriate style.

Point out to students that this is a pivotal chapter; the ideas presented here are developed in chapters 6, 7, 8, 9, 14, 15, 16, and 18 of the textbook.

#### ***5.1 Introduction***

The Introduction shows that length of communication does not guarantee quality, and makes the point that the form of the message must be appropriate to its content.

#### ***5.2 Appropriate communication across cultures***

The notion of appropriacy must be understood if students are to progress in this book. An appropriate message achieves its purpose. A message that is inappropriate fails, even if grammatically accurate.

The basic communication model (table 5.1) applies the principle of appropriacy. Teach and illustrate the parameters in turn; or direct students to complete the exercise and then ask them to deduce the parameters. Make clear that the expression of any one parameter influences the expression of any other. For instance, the choice of addressee influences the style of message communicated to him/her/them. A style appropriate in communicating with the workforce may be inappropriate when communicating with the CEO.

#### ***5.3 One- and two-way communication styles***

Whether or not to use one- or two-way communication is treated here as a matter of style which must be appropriate for the communication to be effective. Much recent writing on communication implies that one-way communication is intrinsically “wrong.”

This section suggests that the circumstances in which a one-way style is appropriate depend on situational factors. The choice is influenced both by task-based factors and by the cultural context. For example, where power distances are great, the superior gives directions, comments, information, and so on; the inferior contributes minimally unless asked directly for information.

When you present the model, emphasize that both this and the one-way model are linear. They describe the communicative process as a series of utterances sequenced one after the next in real time. They do not account for utterances occurring simultaneously or overlapping, or of non-verbal signals.

Section 5.3.4 deals with clues which help in interpreting an ambiguous utterance. The speaker (or writer) uses contextual cues in order to make his/her message appropriate. If he/she does not apply the context effectively, the audience lacks the information by which to interpret the message, and the message fails to achieve its purpose. The audience (or reader) uses contextual cues in order to interpret the message. A failure to interpret the context effectively may mean that the message is not interpreted correctly, and so does not achieve its purpose. Students may need to be reminded of Hall's high- and low-context model in section 2.3.

Section 5.3.5 shows options for communicating unwelcome news up a hierarchy. Section 5.3.6 shows how task factors influence needs for a given communicative style, and raises the issue of how people must adapt their communication priorities when the task changes.

#### ***5.4 Non-verbal communication***

A transactional model gives insights into aspects of the communicative process that linear models are unable to describe. In this book, the model is used as a peg for discussion of non-verbal messages.

Emphasize that non-verbal messages contribute vitally to face-to-face communication. Most (but not all) are involuntary. The person making them may have little awareness of doing so and little control over them; the receiver may not be aware of processing them.

Non-verbal messaging is influenced by culture. This means that misunderstandings arise when members of different cultures are misreading each other's signals, or are unaware that such differences exist.

### **B: Implications for the Business Student**

(This section modifies the material on pp. 115–16 of the textbook.)

Compare communication in your business school to that in some other organization that you know well. (If you know of one, choose a business school or an organization in some other culture.)

1. Assume that you are planning appropriate messages in the two organizations intended to achieve similar purposes (for example, messages used to communicate some news, e.g. a promotion; a reprimand; a query for technical information; a directive; a policy change). What differences occur in your selections of:
  - a. Appropriate addresser?
  - b. Appropriate addressee?
  - c. Appropriate content?
  - d. Appropriate language, medium, style?
  - e. Appropriate time?
  - f. Appropriate location?What factors (including cultural factors) explain these differences?
2. In your business school, when is:
  - a. One-way communication used between teachers and students? What are the expected outcomes?
  - b. Two-way communication used between teachers and students? What are the expected outcomes?
3. In the other organization, when is:
  - a. One-way communication used between teachers and students? What are the expected outcomes?
  - b. Two-way communication used between teachers and students? What are the expected outcomes?
4. What factors explain differences in your answers to (2) and (3)? How important are national cultural and organizational cultural factors?

### **C: Class Discussion Questions**

1. Think of examples of messages that the addresser needs to adjust for different audiences. (For example, the CEO announces a new strategy to the board, to the workforce, to analysts in the media.) What points might the CEO wish to emphasize so that the message is appropriate to the needs of each audience?
2. Think of circumstances in which one-way communication is more appropriate than two-way communication, and circumstances in which two-way communication is more appropriate.
3. Think of tasks which demand greater two-way interaction as they become more complex. How does this affect the relationship between the participants?
4. In your culture, in what circumstances do you communicate with your boss using:
  - A spoken message, in preference to using a text message?
  - A text message, in preference to using a spoken message?
  - A spoken message first, supported by a text message?
  - A text message first, supported by a spoken message?
5. In your business school, what messages do teachers, administrators and students communicate by their dress?

## D: Answers to the Exercise

This exercise shows how situational factors, including cultural factors, influence priorities in communication.

There are no absolutely right or wrong answers, but those below are commonly selected. The main instructional value of the exercise lies in discussing the alternatives. So long as students choose different answers for the different situations, the exercise has made its point.

1. (iv)/(c); or (v)/(c). (Why might it be safer to communicate directly with A? Why might it be more dangerous than communicating with B? Why might (i) be chosen?)
2. (ii)/(b); (ii)/(f) (text then meeting); (iii)/(b); or (iii)/(f).
3. (i) (and C might then quit the company); or (vi).
4. (ii)/(e); or (iii)/(e). (Why might C not choose (a) or (b)?)

## E: Additional Exercise Material

This exercise examines cross-cultural communication in a multinational arrangement.

When the company enters a joint venture with a foreign partner, employees from the partners are likely to apply different priorities when communicating with each other and with project management.

Here is a system by which expatriate manager A communicates new operating instructions to a group of local subordinates P, Q, R. The task is complex and novel. A's culture is relatively individualist and has low power distances; the local culture is collectivist and power distances are much greater.

1. Manager A first explains to P, Q, and R what task they have to perform, how, and why (as appropriate). Their feedback is welcomed, but is not expected. Certainly A could damage their relationship by demanding feedback from any one of the group. If unable to respond, the individual would lose face in the eyes of the others.
2. A explains to local supervisor B, in private, what task P, Q, and R have to perform and how.
3. B performs or explains the task so that A is satisfied that B understands it. B shows how he/she thinks it should be presented to and performed by P, Q, R. Along the way, A invites comments and suggestions as to how it might be improved and modified to fit with local conditions.
4. B performs or explains the task to P, Q, R, negotiating any further modifications with them. Appropriate modifications are tested and implemented.
5. P, Q, R perform the task to B's and A's satisfaction.

Now predict communication problems that might arise in the following situations, and design systems that help participants overcome them.

SITUATION 1

- A comes from a collectivist and high power distance culture.
- B, P, Q, R, come from an individualist and low power distance culture.

SITUATION 2

- The group is a newly formed products development unit.
- A and B are Swedish females.
- P, Q, R are Brazilian males.
- The unit is operating in your Brazilian subsidiary.

## F: Test Bank

1. A long message
  - a. Is equally effective as a short message conveying the same information
  - b. Is less effective than a short message
  - c. May be more or less effective, depending on the context
  - d. Is effective only where people are business-like.

(Answer, c: p. 97)

2. If a poorly dressed stranger approaches me in the street and asks "Have you any spare change?" he expects me to:
  - a. Say "Yes, thank you"
  - b. Take whatever money he offers me
  - c. Give him money
  - d. Ask "Do you?"

(Answer, c: p. 97)

3. Of the six parameters governing message appropriacy:
  - a. All are important
  - b. The most important is the selected addresser
  - c. The most important are the selected content and medium
  - d. The most important is the addressee in large power distance cultures.

(Answer, a: p. 98)

4. A message is persuasive when the addresser:
  - a. Uses emotion to ask for help and support
  - b. Presents explicit information in a direct style
  - c. Presents as much information as possible
  - d. Communicates persuasively, using information that the addressee perceives to be relevant.

(Answer, d: pp. 99–100)

5. Schedule time refers to:
- The length of time in a meeting
  - How long you can be late for an appointment without apologizing
  - The time by when a job should be completed
  - How long you should spend discussing business.

(Answer, c: p. 102)

6. The one-way communication model describes the communicative process as a:
- Monologue, to which only one person contributes
  - Linear process in which only one person makes important contributions
  - Nonlinear process in which one person makes only non-verbal contributions
  - Undemocratic process.

(Answer, b: pp. 105–6)

7. Compared to one-way communication, two-way communication is:
- Always more efficient, whatever the task and culture
  - Never more efficient, whatever the task and culture
  - Often but not always more efficient, depending upon the task and culture
  - Often but not always more efficient, depending upon the personality of the first addresser.

(Answer, c: pp. 107–8)

8. Where power distances are great, a request for clarification by a subordinate may be interpreted by the superior:
- As commitment and participation
  - As a joke
  - As a challenge
  - At face value.

(Answer, c: p. 109)

9. Where power distances are small:
- Subordinates feel relatively free to initiate communications with superiors
  - Subordinates communicate more frequently with peers than with superiors
  - Superiors are free to override interruptions from subordinates
  - Subordinates prefer to communicate with superiors by face-to-face interaction than by the alternatives.

(Answer, a: p. 110)

10. In high power distance cultures such as China, subordinates often communicate unwelcome news up to a superior by:
- Confronting him/her face-to-face
  - Getting drunk first, then confronting
  - Using informal channels, outside the hierarchy
  - Gossiping.

(Answer, c: pp. 110–11)

11. Changes in the task:
  - a. May lead to a change in work relationships, and a change in the communication style
  - b. Usually result from a change in the communication style
  - c. Have no effect on communication style
  - d. Usually result from a change in the organizational structure.

(Answer, a: pp. 111–12)

12. Non-verbal signals carry significant meaning when they are:
  - a. Voluntary, only
  - b. Involuntary, only
  - c. Carried by a range of systems, including stance, gesture, eye movement
  - d. Carried by gesture only.

(Answer, c: pp. 112–13)